



Final Report of the  
Special Purpose Membership  
Review and Audit Committee

October 2009



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# **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

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# **ASSISTING STAFF**

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Ros Spence

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The terms of reference for the establishment and role of the Special Purpose Membership Audit and Review Committee, as resolved at the June 2009 ALP State Conference are as follows:

*This Conference directs the next meeting of the Administrative Committee – fixed for Friday 19 June – to establish a Special Purpose Membership Review and Audit Committee to:*

*(a) Investigate concerns in relation to branch stacking within the Victorian Branch; and;*

*(b) Conduct a complete review of membership processes and procedures across the Victorian branch.*

*The Committee is to report its findings to the Administrative Committee, and to the next State Conference.*

## **SUBMISSIONS AND ASSISTANCE**

The Committee would like to thank all members and constituent units who made submissions to this Committee and in doing so, greatly aided the process of deliberation and the exchange of ideas.

The Committee would also like to thank Lisa Carey, the Assistant State Secretary of the Victorian ALP, and Ros Spence who have provided important assistance throughout the course of the Committee's work and deliberation.

## **COMMITTEE'S FOREWORD**

Throughout its 110 year history, the ALP has been a passionate advocate for social equality and the democratic right of every person to have a say in the decisions which affect them.

The ALP Victorian Branch exists to provide that opportunity for its members and all Victorians, to provide a political voice to protect their interests and advance their living standards.

In 1970, the Victorian ALP rules and approach to membership were fundamentally reshaped. These foundations, which remain largely intact today, paved the way first for federal election victory in 1972 and from then on to a sustained period of success at State and Federal levels which continues to this day.

In 2009, we have another opportunity to rejuvenate membership and determine how the Party can better meet the needs and aspirations of the men and women who support the ALP, both now and into the future.

The Committee's recommendations as outlined in this report are based on a desire to ensure the ALP Victorian Branch continues to provide a voice for all its members, both internally and in public forums, that reflects their values and ideals.

These recommendations were developed through a process of consideration and debate of the many issues raised in submissions from the most important voice in our Party - the members.

The objective of the Committee has not been about simply finding new ways to prevent membership abuses such as branch stacking, it has also been about finding ways to improve members' participation in the Party's activities and ultimately, increasing our membership base.

In Australia and internationally, membership levels in volunteer and political organisations are falling. This report is a clear statement of a direction we believe the Party should be taking to safeguard its future against this global trend.

We hope this report will also provide the basis for an open dialogue in branches and affiliates, where ideas can be shared and a common purpose developed which will make real the aspirations of those who want to create a more fair and equitable society.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

*Recommendation 1: Mechanisms be implemented to make joining the ALP easier and more broadly accessible.*

*Recommendation 2: A review of membership fees be undertaken with a view to reducing overall membership fee levels.*

*Recommendation 3: Consideration be given to further reducing membership fees for ALP members who are members of affiliated unions.*

*Recommendation 4: Incentives be provided to members who pay membership joining fees by traceable means such as cheque, credit/debit card or bank debit.*

*Recommendation 5: Membership applications be dealt with as quickly and transparently as possible.*

*Recommendation 6: A comprehensive recruitment strategy be implemented including a commitment to a goal of 50% female membership and participation and to work to increase membership diversity more generally.*

*Recommendation 7: The Administrative Committee be provided with additional powers to address and prevent branch stacking.*

## MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

*Recommendation 8: Better services be provided to members, including additional member functions, State Conference reform and a membership survey.*

*Recommendation 9: Financial resources be specifically allocated for membership services and activities*

*Recommendation 10: Lodgement of membership renewal forms be limited to 10 per branch per day when not paid by traceable means.*

*Recommendation 11: Incentives be provided to members who pay renewal fees by traceable means such as cheque, credit card or bank debit.*

## **MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT**

*Recommendation 12: New forums be established for Party members to promote engagement and participation*

*Recommendation 13: All Party members be given greater opportunity to be elected to committees and participate in committees.*

*Recommendation 14: Structural issues and proposals to be referred to the Rules Revision Committee.*

*Recommendation 15: Explanatory material regarding Party procedures be made available to Party members to enable more effective involvement in the Party.*

*Recommendation 16: Consideration be given to alternate methods of public office pre-selection.*

# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The Special Purpose Membership Review and Audit Committee was established to undertake an investigation into concerns regarding branch stacking within the Victorian Branch and a review of its membership processes and procedures.

This chapter examines the scope of the investigation and review, the process undertaken by the Committee in conducting the investigation and provides an outline of the chapters comprising the body of this report.

## **CONDUCT OF THE INVESTIGATION AND REVIEW**

The establishment and purpose of the Committee was advertised to Party members and submissions were invited. Following receipt of several submissions, Party members were provided with the opportunity to also directly address the Committee.

Throughout the period of this investigation, the Committee met several times and deliberated extensively upon the submissions received.

To assist the Committee in its deliberations, extensive research was also undertaken. This included the consideration of previous membership reviews at both a Victorian and National level, and where possible, consideration of the experiences of other State and Territory ALP Branches.

The Committee also referred to a survey of relevant literature regarding political Party organisation, and was informed by State Office data around the demographic profile of the membership and rates of recruitment and retention.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMITTEE**

In preparing this report, the aim of the Committee was to provide recommendations which reflected the following objectives:

- To encourage greater enthusiasm to join the Party and discover new ways of engaging with the broader community.
- To encourage greater participation, inclusion and the retention of Party members.
- To provide Party members with a strong involvement wherever possible in the organisation's decision making.

- To maintain the integrity of the Party's membership into the future.
- To propose recommendations of the Committee in accordance with these objectives and the National ALP rules in relation to membership rights and branch stacking.

## **OUTLINE OF THE REPORT**

This report documents the findings of the Committee and provides a comprehensive record of the Committee's investigation, including several recommendations.

The structure of the report is as follows:

Chapter 2 provides the background to the inquiry including the historical context of previous reviews, current concerns and the response of the Party to these concerns.

Chapter 3 considers issues and concerns in regard to membership recruitment and provides recommendations of the Committee to address these issues and concerns.

Chapter 4 considers issues and concerns in regard to membership retention and provides recommendations of the Committee to address these issues and concerns.

Chapter 5 considers issues and concerns in regard to membership engagement and provides recommendations of the Committee to address these issues and concerns.

Chapter 6 outlines the Committee's conclusions and suggestions for a way forward.

## **CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY**

This investigation and review has arisen as a result of the genuine concerns of Party members in relation to the future of our Party as a membership based organisation. It is not the first such review and it will not be the last. The Party, above all, respects the views and concerns of members and will continue to respond when concerns are raised.

This chapter provides the historical context of internal Party reviews, identifies the current concerns of members and details the response of the Party to these concerns.

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Previous ALP internal reviews have recommended a greater focus on recruiting new members, both to support local branch activists to build the Party in their communities and to provide a buffer against membership manipulation.

Having considered previous reviews and the available evidence, the Committee concluded that there is no single solution to eliminating membership abuses.

In 1994 and 2003 rules reforms were introduced to prevent branch-stacking. These changes eliminated the worst excesses of branch stacking but their success was limited with unforeseen consequences. Key elements of these reforms were predicated on the assumption that those who seek to manipulate membership practices are less likely to meet complex administrative procedures than ALP supporters generally. The evidence suggests that this presumption was not well founded, and that reliance on it has made it more difficult for the Party to recruit and retain new members.

The Committee is also concerned that processes are easier to manipulate where membership is low and/or inactive. With this in mind the Committee would prefer to see the Party work towards a model of organisation that is effectively focused on recruitment, retention and engagement - and which involves simplified and transparent membership procedures. The Committee believes promoting a larger and more active membership in this manner is the best defense against membership manipulation.

## **CURRENT CONCERNS**

The May 2008 ALP State Conference adopted recommendations from the Rules Revision Committee which directed that Committee to undertake a review of the Party's Membership Rules and to report back to the 2009 State Conference. The resolution of that State Conference further directed that Committee to undertake widespread consultation with constituent units and Party members as part of this Review.

Throughout that review concerns were raised with that Committee regarding membership processes and allegations of branch stacking.

Included in the submissions received by that Committee were rule change proposals which sought to address concerns regarding membership processes and branch stacking allegations. These proposals included a requirement for direct personal payment of membership fees and membership renewal being the anniversary of members' joining date.

The report of that Committee, including all submissions received, was presented to the June 2009 ALP State Conference.

Debate of these items concluded with a resolution which directed the Administrative Committee to establish the Special Purpose Membership Review and Audit Committee and formed the terms of reference for that Committee.

## **RESPONSE OF THE PARTY**

In response to the concerns expressed within the Party regarding membership processes and potential branch stacking, the following resolution was carried at the June 2009 ALP State Conference:

*This Conference directs the next meeting of the Administrative Committee – fixed for Friday 19 June – to establish a Special Purpose Membership Review and Audit Committee to:*

*(a) Investigate concerns in relation to branch stacking within the Victorian Branch; and;*

*(b) Conduct a complete review of membership processes and procedures across the Victorian branch.*

*Conference notes that Rules proposals presently before it and relating to the administration of membership renewals raise important questions around managing our membership systems with integrity. However, the adoption of such proposals as rules of the Party should*

*be considered following wide consultation amongst the membership and on the basis of evidence – such as the experience of the WA branch which has recently introduced changes to its Rules similar to those set out in submission 23.*

*Moreover, Conference believes that a Committee, responsible in the first instance to the Administrative Committee and properly resourced, should in the present circumstances take a broader look at our processes, administrative capacities, procedures and work with the Rules Revision Committee in respect of any Rules changes that will help build a more democratic and growing Party.*

*This challenge is far too important to be considered solely in the context of two relatively minor administrative steps and without broad dialogue across Party activists.*

*Moreover, this Conference resolves that submissions 22 and 23 of Part C of the Rules Revision Committee report be referred to the Special Purpose Review and Audit Committee.*

*The Committee is to report its findings to the Administrative Committee, and to the next State Conference.*

In accordance with this resolution, the Special Purpose Membership Audit and Review Committee was established at the following meeting of the Administrative Committee on 19 June 2009 by the following resolution:

*This meeting of the Administrative Committee Resolves, pursuant to the resolution of last week's State Conference, to establish a Special Purpose Membership Review and Audit Committee to:*

*Investigate concerns in relation to branch stacking within the Victorian Branch; and conduct a complete review of membership processes and procedures across the Victorian Branch.*

*The Committee will consist of Administrative Committee members Noah Carroll, Andrew Giles and Sebastian Zwalf. The Committee will consult widely with members and affiliates, and invites written submissions from any interested parties.*

*It will report in the first instance to the next meeting of the Administrative Committee and presented detailed findings to the August Meeting.*

*Recommendations concerning any changes to the Rules of the Party to combat branch stacking and increase Party Democracy will go to the next ALP State Conference for endorsement.*

## CHAPTER 3: MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

This chapter considers issues and concerns in regard to membership recruitment and provides recommendations of the Committee to address these issues and concerns.

In doing so, this chapter identifies current obstacles and disincentives to joining the Party, explores potential mechanisms to increase growth and acknowledges concerns regarding branch stacking.

### JOINING THE PARTY

The Committee considered submissions which expressed concern about difficulties experienced by individuals when joining the Party.

The Committee recommends that mechanisms be implemented to make joining the Party easier and more broadly accessible.

One such mechanism recommended by the Committee, is that Central membership applicants be able to join online using a credit/debit card or bank debit, subject to the existing AEC and political affiliation checks. These membership applicants would then be approved at the next Administrative Committee meeting in accordance with the current practice.

The Committee also believes the Administration Committee (via the Membership Administration Sub-Committee) should give further consideration to the future of Central membership as a category of membership distinct from branch membership.

***Recommendation 1: Mechanisms be implemented to make joining the ALP easier and more broadly accessible.***

### Membership fees

Many submissions received by the Committee raised concerns about the relatively high cost of Victorian Branch membership fees.

The Committee is concerned that these costs may present a significant disincentive to joining the Party and believes that reducing the costs of joining the Party is an important component to increasing our membership base.

Therefore, the Committee recommends that a review of membership fees be undertaken with a view to reducing overall membership fee levels. This review should include comparative modelling on the impact of reduced fee levels on overall membership revenue and consideration of alternate fee structures.

This review should also consider offering further reduced membership fees for ALP members who are also members of affiliated unions. The Committee believes the findings of this aspect of the review should form part of a coordinated strategy to better attract union members to the Party and to strengthen this fundamental relationship.

***Recommendation 2: A review of membership fees be undertaken with a view to reducing overall membership fee levels.***

***Recommendation 3: Consideration be given to further reducing membership fees for ALP members who are members of affiliated unions.***

The Committee also noted that central to the protections against branch-stacking in the current Rules is the requirement that, generally speaking, members must pay their own fees. Concerns have been raised with the Committee that this requirement has not always been adhered to and has not been rigorously enforced.

After considering these concerns the Committee is of the view that the costs of moving to a more complex and proscriptive approach to personal payment could outweigh any benefits thereby derived.

As such, the Committee believes that a more appropriate response is for the Party to both reaffirm its commitment to enforcing the existing Rules and to put in place a series of incentives to minimise cash payments for membership.

Therefore, the Committee recommends that incentives be provided to members who pay membership joining fees a by traceable means.

In considering incentive options, the Committee believes that a concession should be made available to members who pay membership joining fees by 'traceable means'. The definition of this term is likely to evolve over time, however it would initially include payments by cheque, credit/debit cards or bank debit. This concession should apply in addition to existing income and concession levels and membership forms should be amended to reflect this option.

An additional incentive recommended by the Committee is that members should also be entitled to apply for membership for up to three years if paying by traceable means.

***Recommendation 4: Incentives be provided to members who pay membership joining fees by traceable means such as cheque, credit/debit card or bank debit.***

## **PROCESSING MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS**

Many submissions received by the Committee expressed concerns at delays in processing and considering membership applications. The Committee agrees that it is important for membership applications to be processed promptly, however this must be balanced with a reasonable scrutiny process to ensure the integrity of our membership and also an appreciation that the Party is a volunteer organisation with many roles and responsibilities undertaken by volunteers.

Concerns were raised, and the Committee agreed, that many delays result from inaction and inadvertent errors at the branch level, for a variety of reasons. Rules designed to combat branch-stacking, it would appear, have also adversely impacted upon legitimate recruitment where branch officials are not clear about the requirements of the Rules.

New changes adopted at the June 2009 State Conference have simplified and streamlined membership rules and enshrined within the Rules membership protocols to manage the administrative aspects of membership admission.

The Committee supports an ongoing focus on ensuring that membership applications are processed effectively, on an efficient and transparent basis. This approach should make clear the reasons why particular scrutiny has been applied in certain cases and should eliminate minor form-completion defects as the basis for denying people ALP membership.

The Committee believes there is clearly a need to better inform members of the recent changes in the Rules regarding membership applications and to also keep branch executive members informed about the need for compliance with the Rules when submitting applications to State Office.

The Committee is of the view that the current reliance of identifying formal defects in membership applications as the primary defense against branch-stacking is at best misconceived, and at worst dishonest. As has been proposed above, the basis for rejecting membership applications should be substantive in nature. Membership should not be withheld solely on the basis of omissions or defects which can be easily resolved.

Therefore, the Committee recommends that Membership applications be dealt with as quickly and transparently as possible.

To achieve this recommended outcome the following practices should be implemented:

- State Office should oversee general membership applications, with only matters which require determinations in relation to rules interpretations or where the facts are unclear, following investigation by staff, to be presented to the Administrative Committee via the Membership Administration Sub-Committee.
- The applicants and branch secretaries be included in all correspondence relating to their membership approval to expediate the application process.
- Branch secretaries and other executive members be given appropriate support and training to deal with new member applications to prevent problems later in the process. Members, and in particular branch secretaries, be more effectively advised about the requirements of the Rules and protocols.
- Applicants for membership be contacted by a State Office employee to confirm receipt of their application and to explain the processes leading to acceptance and membership so as to maximize their involvement in the application process.

***Recommendation 5: Membership applications be dealt with as quickly and transparently as possible.***

## **RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN**

The Committee firmly believes that the most important membership reform the Party could undertake is to increase its active membership. While later chapters of this report consider issues of retention and engagement, a threshold question is: how do we increase membership?

Previous reviews (in particular that conducted by Mark Dreyfus, QC in 1998) have recommended additional resourcing of this aspect of Party organisation as a central element of any recruitment plan, and this is also a feature of submissions received by the Committee. This review supports greater, dedicated resourcing being allocated to support membership growth and for a strategy to be developed around long-term recruitment.

The Committee is aware that several such strategies have been proposed in the past and is concerned that this approach must involve regular reports to the Administrative Committee as well as broad engagement with local Party office-holders in order to be successful.

The Committee believes that a strategic focus on membership growth would present a major safeguard against membership manipulation and would supplement and support (rather than seek to replace) the efforts of local branch activists to build the Party in their communities.

It is of concern to the Committee that our membership remains male-dominated, with age, socio-economic and occupational profiles that do not reflect those found across Labor supporters in the community. While many multicultural communities are well represented in Party membership, others – as well as indigenous Australians – are underrepresented.

The Committee sought the input of the Labor Women's Network in addressing its concern at what appears to be declining rates of female membership. The Committee notes that this body is undertaking a comprehensive survey of the attitudes and experiences of female members, and recommend that this work be the subject of serious consideration by the Administrative Committee when it is complete. The Committee is also concerned that structural commitments to Affirmative Action have not been sufficiently supported at a cultural level, and recommends that the Party continue to work with the Labor Women's Network to address this issue.

As an organisation committed to equality and to diversity, the Committee considers this situation unsatisfactory and believes that a systematic response is needed.

As such, the Committee recommends that a comprehensive, specific, measurable and long term recruitment strategy to attract new members be implemented. This strategy should be widely advertised among Party members, affiliates and the community. Wherever possible, the Party should seek to reflect the diverse community it represents and must welcome existing and emerging ethnic communities.

***Recommendation 6: A comprehensive recruitment strategy be implemented including a commitment to a goal of 50% female membership and participation and to work to increase membership diversity more generally.***

## **BRANCH STACKING**

In reviewing the effectiveness of past Rules changes, it was clear to the Committee that there is no single mechanism that can be relied upon to eliminate all possible instances of inappropriate membership practices. The Committee is of the view that in the past, too much attention has been directed at closing down points of access to ALP membership and not enough attention to sustaining a membership culture that is sufficiently robust to withstand attempts of membership abuse.

When calling for submissions, the Committee specifically requested that members provide any information regarding branch stacking allegations.

The Committee notes that despite this request, only one submission included such a reference. This submission made only vague references to inappropriate recruitment practices and failed to identify the rules breached or the persons concerned.

Despite the lack of evidence presented to the Committee in regard to this issue, the Committee appreciates that concerns about branch stacking have been raised in other Party forums and as such, the Committee recommends that the Rules be amended to provide the Administrative Committee with additional powers to address and prevent branch stacking activities.

These additional powers should include the ability to impose immediate sanctions where there are allegations of misconduct. These sanctions should include the immediate suspension of a branch and/or its members, pending completion of an investigation into any allegations of membership misconduct such as branch stacking. This suspension would remove the rights of a member to vote in any internal Party election (including pre-selections) until the allegation is resolved, with a requirement that any investigation must be resolved within a maximum of 2 months. If required, the final determination would be delivered by the Disputes Tribunal with the power to expel or suspend a member found to have breached the rules.

The Committee believes that the provision of additional powers would not only address any instances of such activities when they arise, but would also serve as a strong disincentive for others to participate in such activities.

Therefore the Committee recommends that the Administrative Committee should refer this matter to the Rules Revision Committee for appropriate rules changes to be drafted and presented for consideration by the State Conference.

***Recommendation 7: The Administrative Committee be provided with additional powers to address and prevent branch stacking.***

## **CHAPTER 4: RETENTION**

Whilst recruitment is essential to developing our membership base, it is equally vital that membership retention rates be improved.

*This chapter considers issues and concerns in regard to membership retention and provides recommendations of the Committee to address these issues and concerns.*

In doing so, the chapter will discuss members services and membership renewals.

### **MEMBER SERVICES**

During the review of membership processes, the Committee undertook an analysis of current and recent membership trends across the Branch.

Whilst it is important to undertake strategic recruitment as discussed in the previous chapter, it is equally important to address the high rate of membership lapse.

One characteristic identified by the Committee was the high number of members who do not renew their membership. The Committee found that an average of over 1000 members lapse every year, with around 80 additional members resigning their membership. Therefore, maintaining our present membership base, requires well over 1,000 new members each year.

The Committee noted that the proportion of central members who do not renew their membership is considerably higher than branch members. This suggests that there is a link between a members' capacity to participate and levels of retention. Whilst this matter requires further work and analysis, the Committee is of the view that in the short term the Party needs to make a greater effort to engage Central members and to encourage these members to take up branch membership.

It was submitted to the Committee that Central members should be given full membership rights. Whilst the Committee considers this submission to have some merit, it is currently inconsistent with the National Constitution and would require action beyond the scope of the Victorian Branch.

Therefore, the Committee recommends that improved services be provided to encourage members not affiliated with local branches to get involved in Party decision-making and branch activities, and that annual and regular functions and forums be held by State Office for Central Members.

The Committee also believes that a fundamental component in addressing membership renewal is to determine and understand the attitudes of both current and lapsed members in regard to the positive and negative aspects of their membership experience.

The Committee is concerned that there is currently an absence of hard data regarding members' views of what they value in their membership or their reasons for leaving the Party. It is noted that a membership survey was prepared by State Office in 2007 but this survey was not carried out.

The Committee recommends that this survey, appropriately modified, should be conducted as soon as possible so that the views of individual members can inform the ongoing review process.

The Committee also believes it is timely to consider the future of State Conference. In other State Branches there is only one annual conference, which appears to have a more central role in the life of those branches. Other Branch conferences are open to the membership at large, not only delegates, and provide an opportunity to come together as Party members.

Having considered alternate models, the Committee concluded that an annual two-day Conference, perhaps with a major social event on the Saturday night, would also go some way to address the many concerns expressed regarding the early finishing of recent Conferences due to a lack of quorum.

As such, the Committee recommends that the Party move towards a model of an annual State Conference to be held over a full weekend, with opportunities for social activities as well as formal business.

***Recommendation 8: Better services be provided to members, including additional member functions, State Conference reform and a membership survey.***

In considering member services, the Committee concluded that in the past, the Party has not set aside sufficient resources to support our members. Currently there is no specific budget allocation supporting membership services and members receive limited information about how their Party operates.

Therefore, the Committee strongly recommends that this must change and appropriate resources must be made available to enable the Party to attract and retain active members through the provision of improved member services.

As such, the ALP Annual Budget should include a reasonable and well considered allocation of funds for the purpose of supporting appropriate membership services and activities.

***Recommendation 9: Financial resources be specifically allocated for membership services and activities***

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL PROCESS**

A number of submissions received by the Committee addressed the issue of “bulk renewals”, where large numbers of renewal forms are submitted by a single member, perhaps not from the same branch as some or all of the members concerned and often on the closing date of renewals at the end of May.

In general terms, two proposals were suggested in relation to reforming the current renewal process. The first proposal is that a process should be adopted whereby the anniversary of the joining date is the date by which a member must renew. The second proposal is that a stricter process be adopted that limits membership renewals that are not submitted directly by the members.

The Committee also notes that many of the remaining submissions appeared more concerned with questions of enforcement of the present Rules than with particular changes to the Rules regarding the renewal process.

The Committee is not persuaded that a move to staggered renewals as suggested in the first proposal, would provide a satisfactory outcome as such an approach would result in an increased administrative burden on branch secretaries and State Office, as well as increasing the number of members who fail to renew.

However, the Committee did conclude that further restrictions should be imposed to address concerns regarding the practice of branch secretaries submitting multiple renewals. In doing so, the important work volunteers do in supporting Party activity must be recognised and a balance must be struck between maintaining our longstanding traditions of branch organisation as well as preventing abuses carried out in contempt of those traditions.

To address the concerns regarding multiple renewals, the Committee recommends that rules changes be implemented to limit the number of membership renewal forms being lodged to 10 renewals, which are not paid by traceable means, per branch per day.

**Recommendation 10: Lodgement of membership renewal forms be limited to 10 per branch per day when not paid by traceable means.**

As with recommendation 3 regarding membership fees, the Committee also recommends that incentives be provided to members who pay their renewal fees by traceable means.

In considering incentive options, the Committee recommends that members be entitled to receive a concession to their membership fees (in addition to existing income and concession levels) and be entitled to renew for up to three years at a time if they pay via cheque, credit/debit card or bank debit.

**Recommendation 11: Incentives be provided to members who pay renewal fees by traceable means such as cheque, credit card or bank debit.**

## **CHAPTER 5: ENGAGEMENT**

For any strategy of recruitment and retention to be effective, the Committee believes that there must be a sustained focus on engagement of members in all aspects of the Party.

*This chapter considers issues and concerns in regard to membership engagement and provides recommendations of the Committee to address these issues and concerns.*

In particular, this chapter focuses on Party forums, committees, structural issues, clarification of rules and procedures and preselections.

### **PARTY FORUMS**

The evidence before the Committee indicated that a substantial improvement is needed to maintain engagement with our membership. The Committee believes that Victorian Labor must remain a Party of activism, and must better facilitate members participating in ways that contribute to the Party's success and that they find rewarding.

In considering potential options for improved engagement and participation, the Committee recommends that new and diverse forums be established.

Previous reviews focused on involvement in policy committees as central to improving the membership experience. The Committee accepts that this is an important aspect of membership participation, but that attention needs to be given to a wider range of activities for members.

Several submissions received by the Committee raised the potential of additional single issue activist groups within the Party to provide a new way for people to engage in policy debates. This was also a matter proposed by earlier reviews and is supported in the National Principles of Organisation.

The Committee believes these forums and groups could more closely connect the Party to progressive groups in the community and assist in building more effective dialogues.

These members forums and groups would play a complementary role to that undertaken by policy committees and would not detract from the representative role of policy committees in providing policy recommendations to State Conference.

The Committee supports this suggestion and recommends that as well as encouraging such member forums, appropriate resources must be provided to support these forums.

While the current Rules facilitate the establishment of new groupings, the slow take-up indicates that a co-ordinated approach with State Office support is required for these structures to be a success.

A number of submissions to the Committee also indicated that many members see great value in being able to access to political news and information and that the Party needs to recognise that on-line forms of engagement are an essential part of a modern organisation.

The Committee notes that the Victorian ALP website currently offers limited information to Party members and recommends that the Party website be updated to become more dynamic and interactive so as to provide a vehicle that allows members to relate and engage with each other.

The updated website should also be expanded to include information about branch meetings, to encourage new member applicants, to provide a link between the Party and the Parliamentary wing and to provide additional forums for internal discussion.

Consideration should also be given to a members' only section of the Victorian ALP Website. This section could provide a facility for members to ask questions of Federal and State Ministers through *YouTube*, via email and other similar means, facilities for branches to post minutes, articles and host forums on branch-member only pages, a community calendar of upcoming events, links to MPs' *Twitter* feed, *Facebook* and websites, policy committee discussion forums, a facility to suggest policy ideas to committees and other working documents of the committee, and up to date information and links to Government reviews, with details to assist members to make submissions to these reviews.

***Recommendation 12: New forums be established for Party members to promote engagement and participation***

## **COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION**

The Committee believes that the current requirements for committee membership are too restrictive and considers there to be merit in creating further opportunities for members to be involved in Committees.

Currently, the Rules provide that for members to be eligible to nominate for any Committee of State Conference (Administrative Committee, Agenda Committee,

Rules Revision Committee and Public Office Selection Committee) they must be a delegate to the State Conference which elects the Committee.

The Committee believes that nominating and participating in Committees within the Party should be inviting and accessible and the rules that restrict participation should be reviewed.

The Committee recommends that all Party members be given greater opportunities to be elected to Committees and to participate in Committees. As such, the current rules that restrict committee membership to only delegates of State Conference, should be removed.

***Recommendation 13: All Party members be given greater opportunity to be elected to committees and participate in committees.***

## **PARTY STRUCTURE**

Many submissions received by the Committee raised issues around the structure of the Party.

Included in these submissions were concerns that the Federal Electorate Assembly structure requires review. Concerns were expressed that the current FEA's are considered largely irrelevant and of little value. The Committee believes this is a matter of urgent concern, particularly given the FEA Executive is often the primary campaigning committee for a federal election.

The Committee believes a more thorough and specific review should be undertaken in relation to structural questions about the interacting responsibilities of ALP Branches, individual members and ALP State Office.

The Committee believes that these structural matters require a detailed examination, but consider this task too important to be compressed into the present process.

The Committee recommends that the Rules Revision Committee be asked to consider all submissions regarding structural issues and proposals, with a view to having a broader debate around the Party as to the appropriateness of our present institutional arrangements and how they complement our future needs.

The Committee also considers it important that the Party formally defines what the objective is of the organisation's structure. For instance, is the objective to create a greater voice for local branches, or to provide opportunities for input to

individual members? The Committee believes that defining this objective would assist in reviewing the structure and composition of the Party.

**Recommendation 14:** *Structural issues and proposals to be referred to the Rules Revision Committee.*

## **RULES AND PROCEDURES**

Concerns were raised with the Committee regarding the clarity of the current Rules and Party procedures and the adequacy of information currently available to members and office-holders. In particular, members raised concerns that the procedures for election and the explanatory material currently available is not easy to understand and may serve as an impediment to participation.

In order to improve engagement with members, the Committee concluded that Members should be provided with easy to understand material in order to enable greater participation.

In addition, the Committee concluded that the Party should endeavour to make compliance with the Rules easier. It was noted that our forms are much more complex than those in other State Branches and should be reviewed with a view to simplification.

As such, the Committee recommends that wherever possible, the Party Rules, formulas and procedures for election within the Party should be simplified or additional explanatory material be provided to better inform members about their rights and responsibilities.

**Recommendation 15:** *Explanatory material regarding Party procedures be made available to Party members to enable more effective involvement in the Party.*

## **PRESELECTIONS**

An important part of Party membership is an involvement in selecting candidates for public office. Many submissions were concerned with this aspect of membership and a variety of ideas to refine or change our processes were put forward.

The Premier, John Brumby, has proposed that a trial be conducted of a selection process involving Labor supporters in a marginal non-held seat.

The Committee believes that this idea merits exploration as the Party considers how we can find the best way to democratically select Labor candidates that represent the broad spectrum of the Victorian community, and who inspire Labor members and engage Labor supporters.

In considering this matter, the Party should review recent experiences in other jurisdictions both interstate and overseas.

***Recommendation 16: Consideration be given to alternate methods of public office pre-selection.***

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This Committee was established to review the current condition of the Party's membership and to provide guidance to the Administrative Committee and ultimately the State Conference.

The clear message that came from submissions and our deliberations is that more needs to be done to increase our membership base and to retain existing members. This process can be aided by reducing the restrictive processes required for a person to join the Party (as either a Central member or a local branch member) and by finding new ways to engage existing members in Party decision making.

Recruiting new members and encouraging existing members to take a more active role in the Party, particularly in local branches, will not only create a vibrant and dynamic environment to exchange ideas and work for change, it will also provide an effective buffer against membership manipulation.

Members have always been the Victorian Labor Party's greatest asset and it is vital that the Party makes participation as straightforward as possible for new and existing members.

This report has documented the establishment, purpose and findings of the Special Purpose Membership Review and Audit Committee.

In doing so, it has provided a number of recommendations which reflect the objectives of the Committee in regard to membership recruitment, retention and engagement.

This report is not proposed to be the final word on these matters, rather it is a clear statement of the direction we believe the Party should be taking to safeguard its future.

These recommendations are put forward to encourage procedural reforms that will reinvigorate the Party's membership and ensure the Victorian Labor Party can continue to represent the ideals and values of its members, whilst working for social change to benefit all Victorians.

Yours in friendship

Andrew Giles, Noah Carroll and Sebastian Zwalf